

Transconductance circuit

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a transconductance circuit intended to convert a differential input voltage, supplied on two inputs, into a differential output current. More particularly, the invention relates to transconductance intended to be implemented in an upconverter circuit and presenting a high linearity and low noise.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Such a highly linear differential transconductance is presented in patent US5497123. This differential transconductance combines two sides each including a single input transconductance. Such a transconductance is a class AB transconductance. This class is advantageous as this is an intermediate between class A, where the consumption is independent of the processed signal, and class B, where there is consumption only when a signal is processed. Advantages of class AB transconductance are also that they present a weak DC and are linear on a large range. Such a transconductance is presented for implementation in a reception chain. As such the transconductance exhibits a low input impedance to match the image rejection filter output impedance. Consequently, the presented transconductance is well adapted to the reception chain as the obtained gain is inversely proportional to the input impedance. A low input impedance is adapted to discrete applications where the input of the transconductance is an off-chip input.

For integrated applications the input impedance needs to be high in order to reduce the consumption. Moreover, such a transconductance is not adapted to the use in transmission chains where a large and linear input impedance is generally asked for upconversion circuits.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The inventors have sought a design for a low-noise highly linear class AB transconductance presenting a high input impedance.

This aim and others are reached with a transconductance circuit as presented in the introductory paragraph characterized in that, where each of the two signals of said differential input voltage is supplied to each input through a follower transistor connected to

said input by its emitter and receives said signal on a control electrode, each of the two inputs of the transconductance is connected to a respective current source that is dynamically controlled by the other input of the transconductance, said current source being such that the current supplied to each input eliminates current variations caused by voltage variations of
5 the input voltage signal.

The invention combines the use of a common collector stage realized through a follower transistor having its emitter connected to the input and the use of a positive feedback from one input to the other in order to cancel out current variations flowing in the follower transistors. Effectively, a simple follower transistor is not able to drive low input
10 impedance with a large input voltage. The combination with a current source providing a positive feedback enables to cancel large variations generated in the collector current of the follower transistor. Effectively, these current variations modulate the base-emitter voltage of said follower transistor and hence introduce distortion, unless it is driven with a very large current. A linear, low-noise, high impedance class AB transconductance circuit is thus
15 obtained.

An implementation of the invention is such that the transconductance circuit comprises two sides, each side comprising an input, an output, at least a first transistor having a control electrode coupled for receiving a bias voltage, a first electrode connected to said output and a second electrode connected to said input, a second transistor having a first electrode and a control electrode coupled in common to said input and a second electrode connected to a power supply terminal.
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Advantageously, said first and second transistors are of the same size.

In an implementation of the invention, wherein each side further includes a third transistor of the same size on said second transistor, said third transistor has a control
25 electrode coupled to said first transistor and control electrodes of said second transistor, a first electrode connected to the output of the other side and a second electrode connected to said power supply terminal.

Such an implementation is known for providing a high linearity of the transfer function of the transconductance for a large input voltage. As said third transistor is of the
30 same size as said second transistor, the transfer function is symmetrical with both negative and positive input voltages.

The first transistor handles a very large amount of current during negative excursion of the input voltage. In contrast, second and third transistors handle a very large amount of current during positive excursion of the input voltage. Acting together, these

transistors provide a transfer function which is linear to both positive and negative input voltages whatever the relative size of said first and second transistors. In a simple implementation, the first and second transistors are of the same size.

An implementation of the current source is thus such that said current source

- 5 includes a current mirror mirroring the current passing through said second transistor with a gain of two. For instance, said current mirror includes a mirror transistor of twice the size of said second transistor, said mirror transistor having a control electrode connected to the first transistor and control electrodes of said second transistor, a first electrode connected to the input of the other side and a second electrode connected to said power supply terminal.

10 The invention also relates to a chip intended to be implemented in a transmission chain and to a transmission device including such a chip.

These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent from and will be elucidated with reference to the embodiments described hereinafter.

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will now be described in more detail, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

- Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram of a transconductance as described in the prior art;
- Fig. 2 is a schematic diagram of a use of a transconductance according to the invention;
- 20 - Fig. 3a represents transfer functions of a transconductance according to the prior art and according to the invention;
- Fig. 3b represents the output currents for a transconductance of the invention;
- Fig. 4 represents a graph illustrating the performance of a transconductance according to the invention;
- 25 - Fig. 5 schematically represents a chip according to the invention;
- Fig. 6 represents a block diagram of a transceiver of radio frequency signals according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Fig.1 represents a transconductance circuit of the prior art. This transconductance circuit has two inputs IN+, IN- for receiving an differential input signal, and outputs OUT+, OUT- for providing a differential output signal. It includes two symmetrical sides each comprising three transistors T1+,T2+,T3+ for the first side and T1-,T2-,T3- for the second side. Said transistors are bipolar or MOS transistors having a collector, a base and an emitter respectively, corresponding to a first electrode, a control electrode and a second electrode.

Transistors T1+ and T1- have a control electrode coupled for receiving a bias voltage, a first electrode connected to said output, OUT+ and OUT- respectively, and a second electrode connected to said input, IN+ and IN- respectively, biased by a constant current Ibias.

Transistors T2+ and T2- are in a diode configuration having a collector and base coupled in common and an emitter coupled for receiving a power supply voltage (e.g. ground) from a power supply terminal PST.

Transistors T3+ and T3- have a control electrode coupled to said first transistor and control electrodes of said second transistor, T2+ and T2- respectively, a first electrode connected to the output of the other side, OUT- and OUT+ respectively, and a second electrode connected to said power supply terminal PST.

Connections of these transistors to the power supply terminal and to the input or output of the circuit may be realized through resistors. For example, in Fig. 1, connection of second electrode of said first transistors T1+ and T1- to the input is realized through resistors R1+ and R1-. Connections of said second and third transistors to the power supply terminal PST are realized through resistors R2+,R2- and R3+,R3-. Said resistors have equal value in pairs and it is advantageous that they all have the same value. Such a remark is also applicable to the transconductance circuit of the invention represented in Fig.2.

An input signal having a positive incursion in voltage relative to a bias point Vbias applied, for example, to input IN+ reduces the voltage across the base-emitter junction of transistor T1+. Conversely, a voltage across the base-emitter junction of transistor T2+ is increased. Transistor T3+ is a mirror transistor of a current mirror circuit formed by transistors T2+ and T3+. The increase in base-emitter voltage of transistor T2+ is mirrored to transistor T3+, which increases a current provided at output OUT-.

Meanwhile, on the other side, an input signal having a negative incursion in voltage relative to a bias point Vbias is provided to input IN-. It has the opposite effect. A

voltage across the base-emitter voltage of transistor T1- is increased by the negative voltage. Conversely, a voltage across the base-emitter junction of transistor T2- is decreased. The input signal having a negative voltage results in an increase in current at output OUT- and a decrease in current at output OUT+. The effects of the two sides of the transconductance go in
5 the same way.

This transconductance continues to perform linearly under extreme conditions where the signal current is equal or bigger than the bias current and is not limited by a current source that biases the circuit. On each side, either transistor T1 or transistor T2 is turned off due to a large input voltage. For example, an input signal having a large positive voltage
10 applied to input IN+ turns off transistor T1+, but increases the current through transistor T2+ which is mirrored to the output OUT-. This output OUT- also receives the current from T1- while T2- is turned off. Effectively, a large negative voltage applied to input IN- turns off transistors T2- and T3-, but linearly increases the current through transistor T1- which is provided at output OUT-. Thus, the transconductance remains linear even under large
15 negative or positive input voltage swings.

Nevertheless, as stated above, this transconductance has a low input impedance. An adaptation of the impedance could be done at each input IN+ and IN- of said transconductance. The elements of such an adaptation of impedance, if active, present the drawback of adding distortion to the input signal. Indeed, the current variations flowing in the
20 active, and thus non linear adaptative circuit, generate distortion.

The effect of a signal δv of the input voltage is shown in Fig.1. Such a voltage variation $+ \delta v$ provided as IN+ results in a current variation δi in each of the two transistors T1+ and T1-. This current variation is then mirrored and an amplified variation of $2\delta i$ is obtained on output OUT+. A current $I_o + 2\delta I$ or $I_o - 2\delta i$ needs to be provided or absorbed by the
25 impedance adaptation elements as the input is biased by a constant current Ibias. The impedance adaptation elements will consequently increase this variation and add distortion. For example, when the adaptation is realized through an emitter-follower transistor, the base-emitter voltage of said follower transistor should consequently change, leading to distortion. Moreover, it makes the noise contribution from the adaptative circuit high when this circuit is
30 momentarily biased at a low current.

Fig.2 represents an exemplary use of a transconductance of the invention that does not suffer from the above-presented drawbacks.

According to the invention, each of the two signals of said differential input voltage are supplied to each input IN+ and IN- respectively, through a follower transistor,

TF+ and TF- respectively, connected to said input, IN+ and IN- respectively, by its emitter and receiving said signal on a control electrode. Moreover, each of the two inputs, respectively IN+ and IN-, of the transconductance is connected to a current source CS- and CS+ respectively, that is dynamically controlled by the other input of the transconductance
5 IN- and IN+ respectively. Said current source, CS- and CS+ respectively, is such that the current supplied to each opposite input, IN+ and IN- respectively, by said current source, CS- and CS+ respectively, eliminates current variations $2\delta i$ caused by voltage variations $+\delta v$ and $-\delta v$ of the input voltage signal.

A positive feedback is thus implemented so as to provide the input with a
10 current equal in magnitude to the one absorbed. The resulting input impedance Z_{in} is then very high. In effect, a signal δv generates a weak current signal $\delta I = 2\delta i - 2\delta i$, and the input impedance seen by the follower transistor $Z_{in} = \delta v / \delta I$ is very high. The follower transistor TF has no longer current variations to be supplied to the input of the transconductance and does not generate any distortion even at high input voltages.

15 In the following the functioning of the left side of Fig.2 will be disclosed. The description of the functioning of the right side is similar. In Fig.2, the case where resistors R1+, R2+ have identical values and where transistors T1+, T2+ have the same size is illustrated. As seen previously, a voltage variation $+\delta v$ generates a current that is divided in, two in the branch including T1+ and in the branch including T2+. Consequently, two current
20 variations δi are generated in each branch. The current variation δi generated in T2+ is mirrored by T3+ to output OUT-. The effect of this current variation δi on output OUT- can be added to the effect of the current variation generated in the branch including T1-. The same phenomenon is observed on OUT+ as the current variation δi generated through T2- is mirrored by T3- towards the output OUT+.

25 Fig.2 proposes an exemplary implementation of the current source, CS+ and CS- respectively. Said current sources CS+ and CS- each include a current mirror including a mirror transistor, TM+ and TM- respectively, having a control electrode connected to the first and control electrodes of said second transistor, T2+ and T2- respectively, a first electrode connected to the input of the other side, IN- and IN+ respectively and a second electrode
30 connected to said power supply terminal PST.

The current is mirrored with a gain of two in order to cancel the current variations entering at the opposite input. Transistors TM+ and TM- of a size that is double the size of T2 may thus be used. In practice, where transistors do not present an ideal

behaviour, the size of said mirror transistor TM is adapted depending on the required range of output current. The connections of said mirror transistor TM+ and TM- to said power supply terminal may be realized through resistors RM+ and RM-. Such resistors are advantageously of the same value as the ones used with said second and third transistors. A transconductance according to such a use presents a high input impedance symmetrical to both positive and negative large voltage swings and a good linearity as illustrated in Fig.3a for a bias current of 5mA. The prior art transfer function illustrated by curve PAC is observed to be less linear than the invention transfer function illustrated by curve IC. The transconductance of the invention is shown to be linear even for high output current. Fig.3b represent the two ouput currents $I(OUT+)$ et $I(OUT-)$ for the transconductance of the invention. Each output current is not linear, but the differential output current $I(OUT+)-I(OUT-)=Idiff$ is perfectly linear.

Indeed, each input of the transconductance, IN+ and IN- respectively, is directly biased by the feedback realized through the opposite current sources, CS- and CS+ respectively, instead of being biased by a constant current source.

The performance of the invention is illustrated in Fig.4. This figure shows the results of a two-tone analysis performed on the implementation of the prior art, illustrated in Fig.1 and on the implementation of the invention presented in Fig.2. The first tone is a differential voltage having an amplitude V and a frequency $F1=375MHz$ and the second tone is a differential voltage of the same amplitude V and a frequency $F2=385MHz$. These two tones are injected at the inputs of the transconductance. At the ouputs of the transconductance, two main tones in current, $IM1F1$ and $IM1F2$, are obtained at the respective frequencies $F1$ and $F2$. Two secondary tones in current, $IM3F1$ and $IM3F2$, are also obtained at frequencies $F1'=365MHz$ and $F2'=395MHz$. These secondary tones result from the non linearities of the transconductance. In Fig.4 are represented the tone $IM1F1$ for the frequency $F1$ and the difference between the tones $IM1F1$ and $IM3F1$ for frequency $F1$. The higher this difference is, the more the transconductance linear is. Curves for $F2$ would be similar. It is thus observed that, at identical bias current, for large input and output signals, the transconductance of the invention is more linear than the one of the prior art. This is illustrated by the fact that the difference $IM1F1-IM3F1$ is larger and that the slope of $IM1F1$ representing the gain of the transconductance does not fall for high input voltages. Moreover, the transconductance of the invention is observed to be higher than the one of the prior art. This is illustrated by the gain expressed by the $IM1F1$ curve. For example, it is observed that a transconductance of the invention can generate two differential tones having an amplitude of 15 mA with a difference $IM1F1-IM3F1$ of 40dB and a global bias current of only 10mA.

The two differential tones are obtained with a gain variation below 1dB. The difference IM1F1-IM3F1 is 12dB higher than the one obtained with the prior art at low signal levels and is even larger (up to 26dB) at large input voltage.

Fig.5 illustrates a chip FTCT intended to be implemented in a transceiver
5 according to the invention. Said chip includes at least a transconductance TRCD as previously described and a mixer circuit MIX dedicated to provide a frequency shifted signal from the current output from said transconductance TRCD.

Fig.6 illustrates a block diagram of a transceiver FCS of radio-frequency signals according to the invention. Generally, such a transceiver FCS is intended to receive
10 and transmit signals through an antenna ANT. A commutation device COM controls the access to the antenna ANT. Said commutation device COM is connected at least to a reception chain RX and to a transmission chain TX. Said reception chain RX includes at least a signal processing circuit SPC and a frequency translation unit FTCR, generally constituted by mixer circuits. A processing unit MC follows these circuits. This processing unit MC also
15 processes the signals to be transmitted and is thus connected to a transmission chain TX that includes at least a frequency translation unit FTCT implemented in a chip as previously described in Fig.5 and an amplification unit AMPT. Such a transceiver is advantageously a telecommunication apparatus: mobile phone... In this exemplary application of the invention,
the invention takes place in an upconverter circuit for which the characteristics of the
20 invention are particularly well adapted.

It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the aforementioned embodiments and variations and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims. In this respect, the following closing remarks are made.

25 It is to be understood that linearity of the transconductance can also be modulated conventionally through the values of the resistors of the transconductance. Notably, modifications of the value of R_o enable such an improvement.

It is to be understood that isolation means can also be added to a circuit of the invention. For example, a transistor can be implemented in cascode with said third transistor,
30 between the collector of said third transistor and the opposite output. This enables to avoid disturbances caused by a charge of said transconductance, for example, a mixer circuit.

It is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the aforementioned telecommunication application. The invention can be used within any application using a

reception chain needing a frequency translation before further processing. Radio-frequency application are thus involved in the invention.

It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the aforementioned mobile phone application. It can be used within any application using a
5 system where a drift frequency occurs, in automobile application for example.

It is to be understood that the method according to the present invention is not limited to the aforementioned implementation.

Any reference sign in the following claims should not be construed as limiting the claim. It will be obvious that the use of the verb "to comprise" and its conjugations does
10 not exclude the presence of any other steps or elements besides those defined in any claim. The article "a" or "an" preceding an element or step does not exclude the presence of a plurality of such elements or steps.